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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
22 September 1966

State Department review
completed

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
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HIGHLIGHTS

The Viet Cong resumed harassment of allied shipping, shelling a US Navy minesweeper. Heavy fighting continues in northern Quang Tri near the DMZ

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I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
US Marines yesterday re-established heavy contact with North Vietnamese Army regulars during Operation PRAIRIE near the Demilitarized Zone in northernmost Quang Tri Province (Paras. 1-2). ARVN forces yesterday conducted a successful one-day ground sweep in the delta province of Go Cong (Para. 3). The Viet Cong resumed harassment of allied shipping transiting the main channel to Saigon today, shelling a US Navy minesweeper on patrol along the Long Tau River (Paras. 4-5).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
Speculation on who will be elected president of the constituent assembly is centering on five well-known politicians from the Saigon area, but no clear favorite has yet emerged (Paras. 1-4).

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Chief of State Thieu favors a popularly elected president under the constitution, and a second election for a national legislature (Para. 5). Moderate Buddhist Institute chairman Thich Tam Chau is making no headway in his efforts to resolve differences with the militants of Tri Quang, and the chances of a formal split in the Buddhist Institute are increasing (Para. 6). A Viet Cong instructor reportedly informed his trainees in Khanh Hoa Province that a coup against the Ky government could be expected by 20 October (Paras. 7-8).

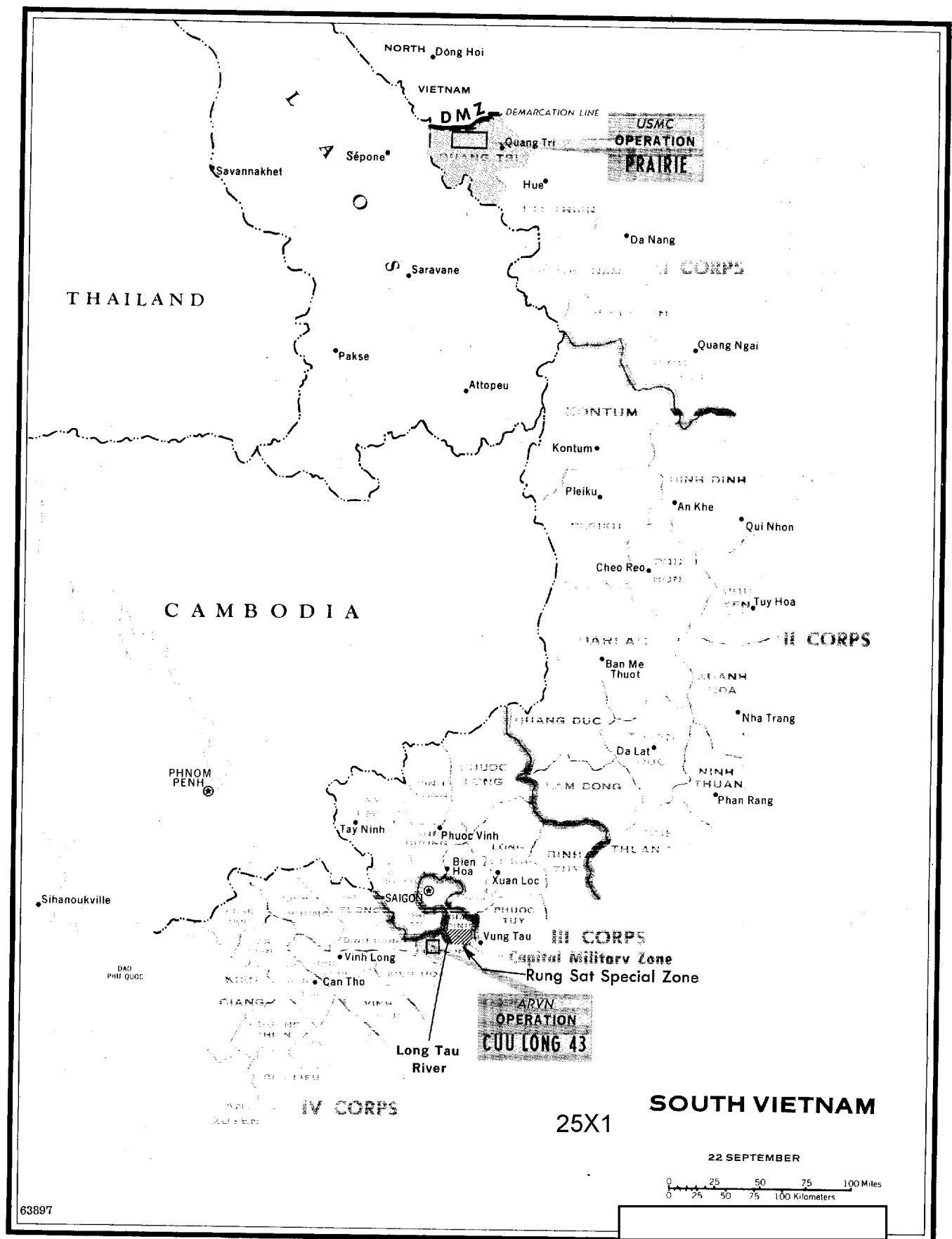
III. Military Developments in North Vietnam:
There is nothing of significance to report.

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IV. Other Communist Military Developments:
There is nothing of significance to report.

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Heavy fighting has again been reported in South Vietnam's northernmost province, Quang Tri. US Marines are continuing to press their major offensive--Operation PRAIRIE--against elements of the PAVN 324 "B" Infantry Division. In yesterday's action, a company-strength marine assault unit, supported by armor, heavy artillery, naval gunfire, and tactical air strikes, attacked and seized a heavily fortified enemy-held village complex less than 1,000 yards south of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). Known casualties among the estimated company-size Communist defense force were placed at 51 killed; American losses numbered four killed and 23 wounded. Postaction battle reports indicate that the village was honeycombed with a maze of interconnecting tunnels, trenches, and heavily reinforced bunkers sprawling over an area of more than 3,000 square yards, perhaps indicating that it was a major enemy supply point and staging area.

2. Since its initiation on 3 August, Operation PRAIRIE--with five participating USMC battalions--has inflicted cumulative Communist losses of 594 killed, three captured, and 109 weapons seized. American casualties to date stand at 100 killed and 323 wounded.

3. Battalion-strength ARVN forces, supported by one Regional Force company and armed helicopters, yesterday engaged a Viet Cong unit of undetermined strength during the one-day search-and-destroy Operation CUU LONG 43 in Go Cong Province, 25 miles south of Saigon. Thirty-seven enemy troops were killed and 37 suspects apprehended; the government loss was one killed.

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Viet Cong Activity

4. Viet Cong forces have resumed harassment of allied shipping in the Rung Sat Special Zone, southeast of Saigon. Early today, a US Navy minesweeper on a routine patrol along the Long Tau River--the main route for ships berthing at Saigon--was fired upon by 57-mm. recoilless rifle fire. Casualties among the ship's seven-man crew totaled one killed and five wounded. The wounded were evacuated by helicopter, and the minesweeper proceeded to Nha Be (on the outskirts of Saigon) under its own power. Two armed helicopters and two river patrol boats were dispatched to the scene as a reaction force, but no further contact was reported.

5. Today's attack may have been launched by elements of a 55-man Viet Cong company-sized unit whose presence and specific mission (that of attacking allied shipping) was revealed in documents captured by US forces in the Rung Sat Special Zone on 3 September. According to the documents, the unit was equipped with antitank rifles, B-40 rocket launchers, and 57-mm. recoilless rifles, and was probably responsible for the sinking of the US merchantman Baton Rouge Victory in this same general area on 23 August.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Speculation on who will be elected president of the constituent assembly, which convenes on 27 September, is centering on five well-known politicians from the Saigon - Gia Dinh area; three are southerners and two are northerners. No clear favorite has emerged as yet. The southerners include former chief of State Phan Khac Suu, president of the Civilian-Military Advisory Council Tran Van Van, and former Saigon city council president La Thanh Nghe. The two northerners are the nationally known independent Dr. Phan Quang Dan and the acknowledged northern Dai Viet leader and publisher Dang Van Sung.

2. Of these five, southerners Suu and Van and northerner Dan have been described as actively pursuing the presidency. Van and Suu, however, are closely associated, and it is not clear whether they would oppose each other in an actual assembly vote. Van has been attempting to discourage Suu from running. Dr. Phan Quang Dan, who is generally considered able and popular, may run into southern opposition because of his northern origin. Dang Van Sung and La Thanh Nghe have both declared that they are not interested in the position, although Nghe has been mentioned as the most likely compromise candidate in the event of an assembly deadlock over the three front-running candidates.

3. Of the five candidates, southerner Tran Van Van appears to be the strongest critic of the military government--especially on the issue of northern predominance among military leaders. He is also the one most likely to call for an early assembly discussion of Article 20, the military government's current veto power over assembly decisions which lack a two-thirds majority. However, both La Thanh Nghe and Dan Van Sung have said that the government should not be challenged on this issue by the assembly, at least initially. It is possible that a private arrangement concerning the use of Article 20 could be reached between military leaders and the assembly, thereby avoiding any public discussion of the issue by the assembly which could damage its relations with the government.

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4. The US Embassy has commented that it is desirable that Tran Van Van not realize his ambition to become assembly president, since regional feelings would only be sharpened under his leadership. Bui Diem, one of Premier Ky's close advisers, has strongly implied that the government is attempting to influence the choice of either Phan Quang Dan or Phan Khac Suu as president.

Thieu's Plans for a Constitution

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5. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Chief of State Thieu strongly favors a second election for a legislative lower house. Thieu is thinking in terms of a popularly elected president who would not be responsible to the legislature. An appointed prime minister would be subject to confirmation by the upper house of the legislature; the upper house would be elected indirectly and would represent functional and religious groups. Thieu plans to send a message to the constituent assembly sometime after 1 November in which he will indicate the general principles which the government feels should be included in the constitution. It will not be a draft constitution in any sense because military leaders prefer to work behind the scenes on such detail, according to An.

Buddhist Institute Leadership Remains in Deadlock

6. According to all reports, moderate Institute chairman Thich Tam Chau has made no headway in his recent efforts to resume active leadership of the Buddhist Institute. The US Embassy has commented that with the militant Buddhists apparently determined to continue their hard line, the chances of a formal split in the Buddhist Institute are increased, [REDACTED]

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Coup Discussed by Viet Cong in Khanh Hoa Province

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[redacted] a Viet Cong training instructor in Khanh Hoa Province told Viet Cong trainees in early September that a coup would be launched against the Ky government sometime before 20 October. The coup would be initiated in the II Corps area and in Saigon by Deputy Premier Co; it would be supported by General Ton That Dinh, recently retired by a special military court for his role in the Buddhist-led "struggle" movement. According to the Viet Cong instructor, the Viet Cong would support the coup because General Dinh had been in touch with Ho Chi Minh, who had promised support "if the general asked him."

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[redacted] the Viet Cong instructor probably made the remarks as reported. However, it is doubtful that if General Dinh had in fact been in touch with Ho Chi Minh, such information would be passed to the Viet Cong rank and file. The Viet Cong are undoubtedly aware of the widespread rumors of friction between Co and Premier Ky, and it is likely that the instructor would make such remarks as part of a Viet Cong propaganda campaign to increase dissension among government leaders. A Viet Cong radio propaganda broadcast last month warned the government's military commanders in II and IV Corps that they "were next in line for purging" by Premier Ky.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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